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SUBJECT: ARMENIA PARLIAMENT ELECTS NEW SPEAKER, NO
SURPRISES

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accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) On June 1, the Armenian Parliament elected Tigran Torosyan to the post of Speaker of the National Assembly, which became vacant on May 29 (reftel A). Torosyan, a member of Armenia's Republican Party and the former Deputy Speaker, was the only candidate. The vote was 94-1, with two ballots considered invalid. Torosyan's candidacy previously had been approved by the two remaining governing coalition members - the Republican Party and the Armenian Republican Federation (ARF/Dashnaktsutjun) - and supported by two other deputy groups loyal to President Kocharian: the People's Deputy Group and the United Labor Party (ref B). According to press reports, President Kocharian also backed Torosyan's candidacy.

¶2. (SBU) In his address to the parliament, Torosyan discussed his priorities for his short, one-year tenure. (Note: The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for the spring of 2007. End note.) He emphasized the need to bring Armenia's legislation into agreement with the new provisions of the Constitution. Torosyan also talked about the importance of holding the 2007 parliamentary elections in compliance with international standards, given the concerns of the international community.

¶3. The mild-mannered Torosyan is the highest-ranking representative of the Republican Party in the legislative branch. Torosyan, former National Assembly Speaker Artur Baghdasarian and Vahan Hovanisyan of the ARF made up the governing coalition's parliamentary leadership triumvirate from 2003 until Baghdasarian's hurried departure from the coalition. During the last three years, Torosyan seized opportunities to raise his profile, including forceful statements at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) where he serves as the head of Armenia's delegation. On substance, Torosyan is generally viewed (even by radical parts of the opposition) as a serious player and the party's brain and workhorse, even though he does not fit the Republican Party model of the well-connected businessperson or slavish loyalist. Torosyan was a vocal supporter of constitutional amendments package favored by the GOAM. He acknowledged the flaws in the November 2005 constitutional referendum, but said that the implementation of the subsequently adopted amendments would lead to positive changes in Armenian politics.
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